

Democrats hot over 'cooling off'

Chairman says Fletcher really just trying to keep pot boiling

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So much for cooling off.

Democrats and Republicans sparred throughout the day Tuesday, casting blame on each other for a stalled special session of the General Assembly, and even calling for people's jobs.

"On the one hand he's calling for peace, on the other hand he's calling for war," state Democratic Party chairman Jonathan Miller said of Gov. Ernie Fletcher outside the Capitol Tuesday. "On one hand he's calling to cool down things, on the other hand he's stirring the pot back up."

On Monday night, the Republican-led Senate and Democratic-controlled House, which had adjourned last week short after the session began, were deadlocked in disagreement on virtually everything. Meanwhile, the state GOP sent out thousands of automated phone calls to people across the state, criticizing Democrats for leaving town as they did.

Primarily, lawmakers' disagreement hinged on whether Gov. Ernie Fletcher should have even forced them into a special session in the first place.

The House claimed that issues including tax incentives for power companies, more than \$400 million in projects and a ban on domestic partner benefits at public universities were not urgent enough to justify the approximately \$60,000 per day cost to operate the legislature. The Senate disagreed.

So, Fletcher said he would order lawmakers back to the Capitol in three weeks, giving them time to take a collective deep breath and hopefully work something out in the meantime.

But as Fletcher was making his public plea for compromise, the state Republican Party was launching a telephone offensive of between 150,000 to 180,000 phone calls to voters across the state criticizing House Democrats for their actions. The calls, which Fletcher's campaign knew about, started in the afternoon and carried into the evening night.

The Kentucky Republican Party on Monday night targeted more than 40 members of the state House — mostly Democrats representing coal constituencies — with automated phone calls, state

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GOP Chairman Steve Robertson said.

The intention, Robertson said, was to hold members accountable for not taking action on a plan to give energy companies tax breaks for locating power plants that use coal for alternative fuels.

Robertson said the calls were geared toward the legislative elections in 2008.

State Rep. Jeff Greer, D-Brandenburg, said calls to his constituents near Fort Knox claimed he was antimilitary. The Senate passed legislation Monday that would give an income tax break to members of the military.

Greer said the calls were "a little bit below the belt."

"When you go into a rural area, 10 minutes away from a military base, and you tell people that this guy does not like the military — does not support the military — that's going to set off some tempers," Greer said. "And that's what happened."

Robertson said it was unconstitutional for the House to leave before the Senate, and claimed Democratic gubernatorial nominee Steve Beshear and Miller had helped orchestrate the move. Robertson defended the so-called "robocalls" and said Miller, who is also state treasurer, should resign his elected post.

But Beshear spokesman Robert Kellar said Beshear was not behind the House's strategy.

Still, Robertson said he didn't



AP/ED REINKE

Democratic Party Chairman Jonathan Miller was flanked by Democratic Reps. Ruth Ann Palumbo of Lexington and Jeff Greer of Brandenburg as he discussed the status of the special legislative session Tuesday.

think the back-and-forth was undermining Fletcher's call for lawmakers to take some time to calm down and reconsider.

"You can't taint water that's already filthy," Robertson said.

Nevertheless, Miller said the calls were evidence that Fletcher's motivation for calling a special session was an attempt to spur his re-election campaign. Fletcher, a Republican, is seeking a second term against Beshear in the Nov. 6 election.

"That's wrong, the taxpayers aren't going to stand for it," Miller said. "The people of Kentucky do not believe that their public re-

sources should be used for merely political purposes."

During the three-week Fletcher-imposed break, legislators would continue to earn their daily salary, which ranges from about \$180 to about \$225 a day, according to the Legislative Research Commission.

Senate President David Williams said the House would have to return to vote on a bill that would repeal legislators' pay between now and July 30. House Speaker Jody Richards, however, said the House already agreed to withhold their pay before adjourning.